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RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000539

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 LEADERS AIR FRUSTRATIONS

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) At a May 9 dinner hosted by March 14 MP Nayla Mouawad, visiting NEA DAS David Hale discussed June 7 parliamentary election outcomes and consequences. Minister of State Nassib Lahoud critiqued March 14 campaign failings and adamantly denied any possibility he would participate in March 14 photo ops or the election. Lahoud and Druze MP Marwan Hamadeh also offered guidance on what to expect from a potential March 8 majority in the new government.

2. (C) Mouawad stated that Maronite Christians were still angry at Druze leader Walid Jumblatt for his publicly leaked criticisms in April against the Maronites. Several interlocutors assessed that March 14 leader Saad Hariri lacked political experience and might be distracted by financial problems in his family business. End Summary.

NATURE OF THE BATTLE

3. (C) On May 9, MP and former Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad hosted a dinner at her residence for visiting NEA DAS David Hale and the Ambassador. Guests included National Liberal Party leader Dory Chamoun, Democratic Renewal Movement leader and Minister of State Nassib Lahoud, Druze MP Marwan Hamadeh, and Dr. Pierre Zalloua of the Lebanese-American University.

4. (C) Lahoud, who was cajoled by his fellow March 14 leaders at dinner to lend his support to March 14, despite his exclusion from their list, explained that March 14 had erred through its recent candidate selection process and lost some of its credibility with voters. Lahoud advised that elections are won by "movements," rather than deal-making, and that March 14 was perceived by many voters as "seat traders." He opined that the proper tactic in March 14's campaign should be to allude to, through campaign literature, the consequences of a March 8 majority by depicting March 8, namely, Hizballah, as the perpetrators of the May 7, 2008 violent takeover of Beirut. "You must show the public the real consequences of the alliance," he remarked. After

hearing several exhortations to rejoin the elections, Lahoud defiantly said "No way," and added, "If I had known these comments were coming, I might not have arrived for dinner."

ELECTIONS: THE DAY AFTER

¶5. (C) Hamadeh, referred to by Mouawad as "the most popular Druze," was dire in his predictions for a post-election March 8 majority. He declared if March 8 won, there would be another war with Israel. Hamadeh sarcastically commented that the country would need to be destroyed (to rid itself of Hizballah) in order to rebuild it.

¶6. (C) Lahoud believed a March 8 majority would not lead to quick, overt GOL policy changes. Rather, he speculated, Hizballah would be content with one or two ministers, and would work "under the table" to manipulate the direction of government. Chamoun added that Hizballah had time on its side. Lahoud discerned that President Sleiman could not withstand the pressure of a Hizballah-controlled agenda. According to Lahoud, Sleiman is best leading as he does now as a consensus leader, not rocking the boat. Sleiman cannot serve the government as a leader of a centrist bloc, he noted, adding that Sleiman was not forceful enough to "tip" a balance.

HARIRI: MISSING IN ACTION

¶7. (C) Chamoun noted some of March 14,s failings were due to
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Hariri's political inexperience. Hariri is not used to the demands of Lebanese politics, he said. Others asserted that Hariri has been distracted for several months by financial losses occurred in the family businesses.

¶8. (C) Mouawad added that she was perplexed by the absence of a Saudi ambassador to Lebanon. The previous Ambassador, Khoja, returned to Riyadh to serve as a Minister of State and his named replacement is currently serving in Pakistan.

MARONITES STILL MAD ABOUT JUMBLATT

¶9. (C) Mouawad and Hamadeh engaged Hale on his May 6 trip to Riyadh. Hamadeh remarked that Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was traveling to Saudi Arabia on May 9 in the hope of obtaining more money. Mouawad remarked that Christians were still upset at Jumblatt about his recent derogatory comments concerning Maronites. Chamoun insisted Jumblatt should have apologized sooner than he did and should have visited Maronite Patriarch Sfeir, which he has yet to do, noting Sfeir was very gracious to Walid. (Note: As of May 11, Jumblatt remains in KSA; Ambassador will meet with him upon his return. End note.)

¶10. (C) Comment: Interlocutors were tepid in their predictions of a March 14 election victory. Most of the conversations centered on what had gone wrong, and what might yet be done to fix the situation. End comment.

¶11. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this cable.
SISON